

wound jewelry

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I Am Not a Corpse

A corpse cannot cry. A man who cannot cry is a corpse. I am not a corpse, alas.
If I were, I'd be in a suit. If I were, I'd be the main event, the center of attention.
All the vultures would be my friends.
All the grubs would love me.
I'd be in touch with dirt, the slime divine, the sluttly mud, the lovely muck.
Or something a little more incendiary, a mite more vital, robust, fume inducing.
Back to my thesis: a corpse cannot cry.
The tear ducts are bankrupt in death.
There's a haughtiness that sets in, that sees in raw emotion its sour avatar.

Mussel Memory

Andreas Cappelanus taught that the word
“love” comes from the word meaning
“to fish.” I used to fish off a bridge on
the Eastern Shore. There’s a picture of
me on a rampart holding a flounder
who sought his Maker on my hook.
My hair is disheveled and my chest
is puffed. I’m holding the flounder by
the tail and motioning to my cousin
who was to die before his daughter
turned two. I had plans that night
to borrow a towel and lie down under
the pier with this blowzy Towson girl,
but I had a love and could not be untrue.

Knot Eye

The diagnosis was peculiar, the doctors agreed,
but so was the condition. He had knot eye.
He was unable to see a piece of string, but he
could see the knot. He was unable to make out
a plank, but he could see the darkened whorl.
He was unable to see his girlfriend's discomfort,
but he saw her stomach tighten as they discussed
Thanksgiving. She wanted to get married. He was
afraid. Their bickering led to lumpy disagreements,
but he knew sooner or later they'd fall back into
each other's arms. That's the way it is with the world.
What waits for us at the end is embrace. He stared
into the large mirror in her living room and watched
as she wound her stringy arms around his skinny neck.

Florid Psychosis

On the advice of a friend, I've stopped dreaming. But as a result, I've developed a florid psychosis in which everything I've dreamed for the last thirty-three years is now real. I have new friends, a new job, my dead relatives have all come back, I'm half my weight, have all my hair, reside in Prague. It's February 1924. Kafka won't die until June. Freud's 67. He's just published *The Ego and the Id*. I refuse, on principle, to read it. Lotte Reiniger is working on the cutouts for *Prince Achmed*. I bought a radio embroidered with pearls. It doesn't work, but why, why, why does it have to?

Dad and the Red Light

My father is twenty-two years old. He's stopped at a light at Broad and Market. He sees a guy in a tan jacket start to cross in front of him. All of a sudden, the guy disappears. The light turns green. Confused, my father gets out and walks to the front of his car. The guy is face down on the ground, his head wedged in front of the passenger wheel. He picked out my dad as his agent of suicide.

I've been obsessed with this story ever since I was told it when I was fourteen or so. Dad was, illustrating to me the key importance of checking things out. Then I saw, all his life, wannabe suicides flit towards him like moths. He saved them all.

Hope's Amanuensis

I was hope's amanuensis
but I was low on carburetor
oxygen and my fraud protection
just lately had expired. If asked
how I was feeling, I would have said,
“Triangular,” but the truth was
I felt an osculatory unhappiness
circumnavigate my soul. I was no
stranger to such feelings. Indeed,
they had inhabited me even longer
than prose had been degraded, but
there are worse things in the world
than unhappiness: capillary wealth.
contagious cleansing, wound jewelry.

Great Moments in Blindness

I am complicit in the darkness. It trails
after me like the milky spoor of a mother
skunk. I breathe it out in stumpy conversation
I must have learned from television. Well, this
lack of vision is my own fault. I should have
known better than to circumcise my heart
and bathe my eyes in witch hazel.

I was already an adult when I stood in that cage
with you. We bent our knees and rocked it
side to side, higher and higher, and you laughed,
you laughed, and when we almost sent it over
the top, you screamed with laughter, you
shrieked. For joy. But you weren't laughing.
No. I see it now. You were just screaming.

Drinking an Orange Julius While Listening to Pink Floyd

I was strapped for cache
so I called my friend Paolo
who wears Ecuadorian gray
and prefers Celine to Celan
and asked him how to juggle
all the crap life was throwing
my way, and he said, “Boyo,
take your chessboard to Andorra
and mate someone” but, having
already done that, he was of no help
at all, so I grabbed one of my shelf
improvement books and read: “I
saw the best minds of my generation
enter law school” and realized that
all the works I thought I knew had
been defaced by assassins. I asked
the Wife of Bathroom for a hit of
Aleve. She handed me the anodyne
and went off to make chicken
a la Siegfried. I drifted into dream:
A man in a turquoise slicker sat on
a skittish horse wearing an iron hat.
He was pointing at a group of children
in the housewares section of Wal-Mart
playing catch with the throw rugs. A
tsunami was rolling through the aisles.
The man bellowed, “Watch out!” but he
couldn’t force their attention. The waters
poured over all the products of mankind.
Death came as a scythe of relief.

In My Nephritic Dreams

In my dreams, God is toxic. In my dreams,
heroism feels cowardly. In my dreams,
traveling west is an oxymoron. In my dreams,
I confuse Kurt Vonnegut with Kurt Waldheim.
In my dreams, I forget Arthur Schopenhauer's
first name. In my dreams, the Spanish and the
Bermuda onion vie for a place on the Danish
pastry. In my dreams, a bazooka is a measure of time.
In my dreams, the word "expostulate" means "to cough."
In my dreams, the remoulade contains traces of sulfur.
In my dreams, instead of a cap on my head, I wear
a "trade." In my dreams, I watch a sand shark sleep
on a coral bed. In my dreams, the chickens come home
to rooster. In my dreams, I am awake most of the night.

Sewer, 1962

if you drop a quarter
in a sewer,
there's no way
of getting it back

save finding a long
stick and putting
chewed gum on one end
and poking for it

that is, if that's
your only quarter
and you really need it
(yeah, you really need it)

you really want to see
the air-conditioned matinee
of Damon and Pythias
with your brother

but on the way there
your mother dies
in labor and you
remain an only child

Pack Me in Raw Salt

I poured bleach on the bloody moon
and turned it flounder white. Then I
wrote my autobiography on it in ash.
When the bill came due, I joined the
cowboys who navigate by fear. They
locked me in a cabin inhabited by
moles. I escaped through the mirror
and landed in a lake. I baked for weeks
in seaweed and lost a lot of flesh.
Jesus picked the barnacles off me
and packed me in raw salt. I healed
in time to see the soldiers welcomed
home. A barker was selling cosmetic
hope. It was Gatlinburg in mid July.

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